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Hawai'i Department of Health announces the first pediatric influenza death of the season

HONOLULU, HI – A state resident under the age of 18 has died of influenza, the Department of Health (DOH) announced today. This death serves as a sober reminder that influenza is circulating widely in Hawai'i. Everyone six months of age and older can be protected from influenza by getting their flu vaccine.

This is the first death of a child from influenza in Hawai'i during this flu season. The child was hospitalized at the time of death. Out of respect for the family's privacy and in compliance with medical privacy laws, no further information about the child is being released.

"We are especially saddened to announce the death of a child in our community. Our thoughts and condolences are with the family at this difficult time," said State Health Director Dr. Kenneth Fink, "If you or your loved ones have not received the flu vaccine this season, I hope you will consider doing so."

Vaccines provide protection against the impacts of certain infectious diseases, including influenza and COVID-19. Keeping up to date on all recommended vaccinations and boosters provides strong protection from severe illness, hospitalization, and death. Vaccines are widely available statewide at pharmacies, clinics, and healthcare facilities. A list of COVID 19 and flu vaccination locations can be found at <https://www.vaccines.gov/>. The DOH encourages anyone who is not up-to-date, or is unsure whether they are up-to-date, to consult with a pharmacist or healthcare provider about getting vaccinated.

Hawai'i's last pediatric death from influenza occurred in January 2020. In the prior 10 years, Hawai'i has recorded 6 pediatric deaths due to influenza. During the height of the pandemic,

Hawai'i experienced very low rates of flu in residents of all ages. "The restrictions we put in place for COVID-19 protected us from other respiratory viruses as well," said State Epidemiologist Dr. Sarah Kemble, "That's likely the reason there were no pediatric influenza deaths during the last three years."

Many respiratory viruses are circulating in Hawai'i this winter, including flu, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) infection. Symptoms are similar, and it's usually not possible to tell one from another without a test. Those at highest risk, including those with underlying health conditions — the elderly, infants, and anyone experiencing severe symptoms — should seek healthcare promptly, for testing and treatment as needed.

More information about influenza and other respiratory diseases is available at <https://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease-types/respiratory-viruses/>.

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